

## Anti-LGBTQ threats, fueled by internet's far right 'machine,' shut down trans rights and drag events

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By [Ben Collins](#) and [Doha Madani](#)

Inundated with threats during Pride Month, LGBTQ+ rights advocates and allies have been forced to cancel events and involve local law enforcement authorities after a group of white nationalists were arrested outside a Pride event in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho.

California state Sen. Scott Wiener said he was at a supermarket Sunday when he was alerted by a staff member not to return to his home before calling police. Wiener, who had joked on Twitter about making "Drag Queen 101 part of the K-12 curriculum" in response to a tweet last week by a Texas state House representative announcing a bill seeking to ban drag shows in the presence of minors, had received an email saying there was a bomb in his house.

Bomb-sniffing dogs had to clear Wiener's apartment before he went back in.

"There is a very orchestrated network of right-wing accounts and personalities to coordinate on whatever the current attack message is and who's going to be targeted. And they have an army of social media trolls who amplify their messages," he said in a phone interview. "It's a very orchestrated attack machine."

The bomb scare directed at the state senator's home was just one of several threats and intimidation tactics aimed at LGBTQ activists in the last week, some just hours after [the high-profile arrests of 31 members of the white nationalist group Patriot Front](#) in Idaho on Saturday.

The threats mostly aimed to shut down events for transgender rights and drag performances, which have become frequent targets of extremists, militias and far-right personalities during June, which is Pride Month. They come as [more than 200 bills targeting LGBTQ people](#) have been filed across the United States this year.

Far-right influencers and militias have been particularly focused in the last month on "Drag Queen Story Hour" events, which have been hosted at libraries throughout the U.S. since 2015.

Discussion of such events has spiked online. Mentions of drag queen story hour on Twitter increased 777% in the last month, according to data provided to NBC News by the social media intelligence company Signal Labs.

Michael Hayden, a senior researcher at the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit civil rights and legal advocacy organization, said the "level of disruption that's happened in the last few weeks is new."

He said the process of targeting specific LGBTQ events has become mainstreamed and systematized in recent months by far-right influencers with megaphones on social media.

“The way this works is, that they have to get their targets from somewhere,” Hayden said. “Things get broadcast in advance by LibsOfTikTok and other major influencers on the right-wing right now. Then, extremists go into planning over it.”

The person who runs the LibsOfTikTok account did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Hayden said there were instances in 2018 of the white nationalist group Identity Evropa crashing talks by trans rights activists and drag queen story hours, but those events did not snowball into a string of actions by disparate extremist groups.

“There’s a level of chaos involved with the target, but the choice of target comes from top down,” Hayden said. “And the messaging is tied up with the far-right machine.”

That increase in online discussion has been matched by a growing number of real-world incidents.

Around 1:30 p.m. ET Sunday, hours before the threat to Wiener’s house, members of the far-right group Proud Boys interrupted a Drag Queen Story Hour at the San Lorenzo Library in Alameda County, California, and screamed transphobic and homophobic slurs in front of the children, according to local authorities.

“An active hate crime investigation is underway as is an investigation into the annoying and harassing of children,” Alameda County Sheriff’s Office Lt. Ray Kelly said in a news release.

Anti-LGBTQ rhetoric has exploded in many conservative and far-right online communities in recent months.

Wiener’s satirical post about Drag Queen Story Hour was quickly aggregated by far-right influencers, specifically the account LibsOfTikTok, which aggregates examples of events, public school teachers and others who publicly support LGBTQ causes on TikTok and other platforms that are frequently cited by far-right influencers and outlets. LibsOfTikTok had also posted several times condemning the Coeur D’Alene Pride rally in the run-up to the event.

The account specifically called out a performance titled the Family Friendly Drag Dance Party to the town’s mayor, saying “We live in hell.”

Sarah Kate Ellis, the president and CEO of GLAAD, said in a statement that the recent spate of threats are an example of “how inaccurate and harmful portrayals of LGBTQ people can lead to real-world violence.”

“It’s inevitable that extremists will be activated online and in the real world when right-wing leadership is feeding them horrific lies about LGBTQ people around the clock,” Ellis said.

The 31 men associated with Patriot Front were charged with criminal conspiracy after the event. A 911 caller described them to police as resembling a “little army” after seeing the group of masked men loading into a U-Haul truck with shields.

Coeur d’Alene Police Chief Lee White said following their arrests that he believed that caller likely prevented a more dangerous situation, as the group allegedly planned to incite a riot at the local Pride in the Park event nearby.

White told reporters that he assumed the Pride event became a “flashpoint” for anti-LGBTQ groups. Groups that participated in the Jan. 6th riots such as the Proud Boys and the Three Percenters also appeared at the rally, along with Atomwaffen, a neo-Nazi group.

Of those arrested, only two individuals were residents of Idaho. White also confirmed to reporters Monday that he observed documents in which the group allegedly planned to create a confrontation, including the use of smoke grenades, before retreating down Sherman Avenue.

Hours after the Coeur D’Alene arrests Saturday night, a transgender rights rally scheduled for Sunday at Atlanta’s Liberty Plaza was canceled when organizers said they received a specific, targeted threat for an activist that included the date, time and location of their planned event.

Alex Ames, an organizer for the Georgia Youth Justice Coalition that had planned the rally, said it was a “vulgar death threat” that caused them to quickly cancel the event. She said the rally was rescheduled as a virtual event on Tuesday for the safety attendees.

“We want to get those stories out anyways, without anyone having to make that difficult choice of ‘Will I go out there without knowing how safe I will be?’” she said.

Despite the wave of threats against LGBTQ+ events, Wiener said, it’s “even more important this year for us to be out” at events during Pride Month.

“Particularly with all of these threats around the country — now, more than ever, we need to be visible and vocal and out there,” he said. “The last thing we should be doing is curling up into a ball, because then they win.”